



The Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency Ideas for Judges

Every child deserves a forever family! Achieving permanence requires an unequivocal commitment from all sectors to ensure that every young person served by Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems leaves those systems with safe, loving, and enduring relationships that are intended to last forever. ***Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families 2011*** presents a framework and recommendations to guide permanency efforts. Moreover, it is a ***call to action*** for all partners to contribute to achieving permanence for children and youth.

This supplement to the *Blueprint* builds on ideas generated at the May 2011 Children's Justice Permanency Summit. It identifies a set of concrete actions that you, in your role as a judge, can incorporate in your daily work to help achieve permanence for these children and youth.

Family and Youth Engagement

Every family and youth should have a voice. Outcomes improve when youth and their parents are active participants in their own planning and service provision. When parents are empowered, guided, and supported in their parenting efforts, and when youth's opinions are valued and fostered, lines of communication open up and more candid conversations about issues and barriers to safe case closure can be dealt with in a strength-based environment.

What you can do...

- ☐ Assure the youth attends hearings
- ☐ Utilize "Child's Report to the Court" forms
- ☐ Schedule Family Team Meetings in Court and include time and place in Court order
- ☐ Assign specific tasks, e.g., who will assure the parents can understand the written documents they receive? Who will follow up on the child's ability to continue clarinet lessons?

Family Preservation

First and foremost children belong with their birth families. In most cases, children and youth are best served by preserving and supporting families. Family preservation efforts include short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children and communities safe. In juvenile justice, diversion strategies and home-based services recognize that youth can be rehabilitated and communities can be safe without separating youth and their families.

What you can do...

- ☐ Ask what needs to happen for the child to remain in / return home
- ☐ Encourage use of family finding strategies to maintain family connections

- ☐ Frontload cases with intensive efforts to allow significant family contact consistent with the child's developmental needs
- ☐ Determine if concurrent jurisdiction should be granted to enable non-custodial parent to proceed in District Court

Placement and Reunification

Regardless of the reason, children are traumatized by removals from their home. When out-of-home placement is necessary, it is critical for everyone involved to engage immediately, adopt a sense of urgency, and utilize all services and individuals connected to the family to launch the reunification process. When reunification is not possible, it is critical to ensure that the youth is connected to at least one committed relationship with another loving, caring adult.

What you can do...

- ☐ Ask at each hearing what needs to happen for the child to remain/return home
- ☐ Assure that a timely and developmentally appropriate family contact plan is in place
- ☐ Direct the use of family finding strategies to keep the youth connected to kin
- ☐ Utilize the "Child's Report to the Court" form

Adoption and Guardianship

Children in out of home placement who cannot be reunified need permanency. Adoption and guardianship are preferred permanency options as opposed to long-term foster care. All children and youth can be adopted regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, special need or sibling group size. When individual circumstances determine that adoption is not the best option, guardianship is another avenue to permanency.

What you can do...

- ☐ Review all TPR orders in Court within 60 days of filing TPR to expedite finalization of adoption
- ☐ Order staffing to inform potential guardians of pros and cons of pursuing guardianship over adoption
- ☐ If case is appropriate for transfer to Probate Court for guardianship, notify parties in Review Order prior to permanency that the court will consider this option at the Permanency Hearing
- ☐ Do not cancel review hearings in anticipation of adoption; cancel review hearings only upon adoption

Transitioning to Adulthood

It is never too late to achieve permanence. Older youth face a unique set of challenges and risks as they move into adulthood. When youth age-out of foster care they often lack the financial, emotional, educational, and protective support typically provided to young people in permanent, intact families. Permanence remains a vital and critical need for these young adults.

What you can do...

- ☐ Include in court orders an independent evaluation of the sufficiency of the transition plan
- ☐ Set a hearing within 90 days of the youth aging out; assure the youth attends this hearing
- ☐ Determine if a Guardian ad litem should remain assigned to the youth after the case closes due to youth reaching the age of majority
- ☐ Provide AMP (Achieving Maximum Potential) information to the youth